



Senators Merkley, Bennet, Blumenthal, Casey, Coons, Jones, King, Wyden and Van Hollen *The Elementary and Secondary School Counseling Act*

Mental illness affects one in five—20 percent—of American youth. Approximately half of all lifetime cases of mental illness begin by age 14 and over one third of students age 14 and older with a mental health illness drops out of school. 90 percent of youth who die by suicide had a mental illness.¹

Youth with access to mental health services providers in their school are 10 times more likely to seek care than youth without access.² But school districts across America lack the investment and resources to provide students with the necessary in-school treatment and care they need. Youth with mental illness often find themselves waiting for months to receive mental health care – leaving too many families worried about their children’s safety and wellbeing.

The Elementary and Secondary School Counseling Act would:

Establish two five-year renewable grant programs to effectively staff elementary and secondary schools with mental health services providers by providing federal grants to states to disburse to school districts.

- **Base allotment grants:** State educational agencies would receive a grant on a proportional basis based on the number of elementary and secondary school students in each state. No state would receive less than \$1,000,000 for this grant.
- **Need-based grants:** State educational agencies may apply, on a competitive basis, for additional funds through a need-based grant. States must provide matching funds in an amount equal to not less than one half of the additional grant amount. These grants are based on need for mental health services providers to achieve the recommended student-to-counselor ratios.

The recommended student-to-counselor ratio is 250 students per counselor, but the national average is 455 students per counselor and continues to rise.³ For school psychologists the recommended ratio is 500-700 students per provider and 250 to 1 for school social workers.

With the increasing prevalence of mental health illness among K-12 students, it is more important than ever that students have access to care, and are not left waiting for support during a crisis. The Elementary and Secondary School Counseling Act would help ensure that students receive the mental care and support they need in school so that they can focus on what is most important – learning and achieving their potential.

***Endorsed by the National Association of School Psychologists,
School Social Work Association of America, American School Counselor Association,
American Psychological Association, National PTA, and National Education Association.***

¹ <https://www.nami.org/Learn-More/Mental-Health-By-the-Numbers>

² <https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources/mental-health/school-psychology-and-mental-health/school-based-mental-health-services>

³ <https://www.schoolcounselor.org/asca/media/asca/Publications/ratioreport.pdf>